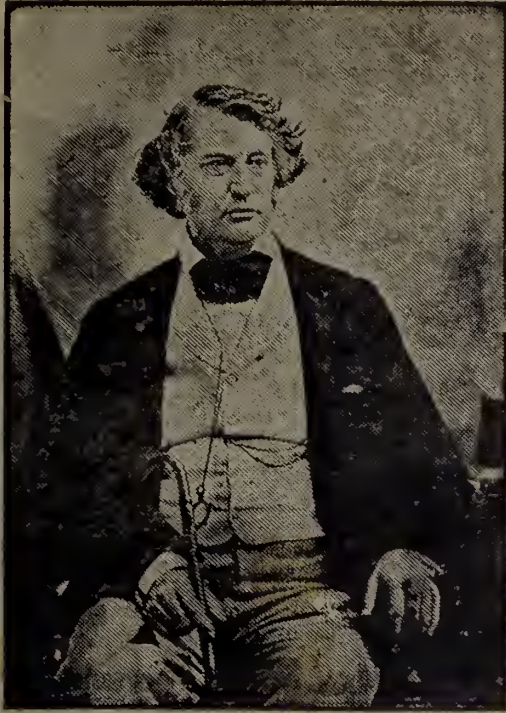


CHARLES SUMNER.
A PLEA FOR THE
Civil and Political Rights of Negro-Americans.



Jan. 6, 1811.

CHARLES SUMNER

Jan. 6, 1911.

BOSTON CENTENNIAL ORATION DELIVERED BY

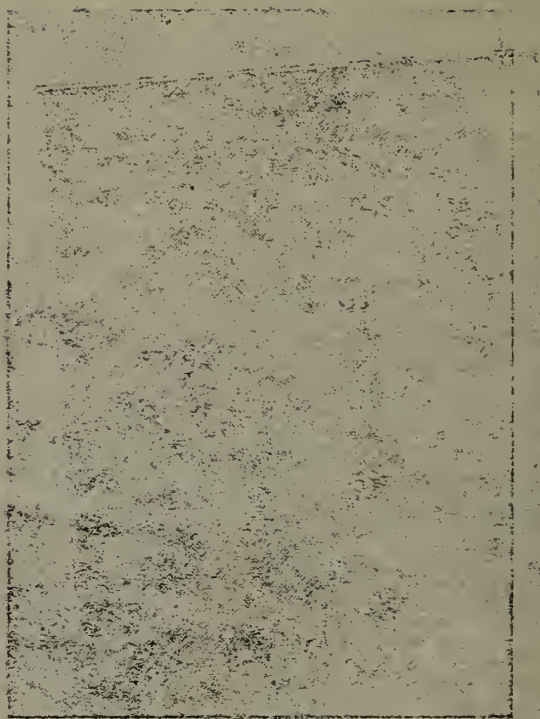
REVERDY C. RANSOM

IN

Park Street Church, Boston, Mass.

JANUARY 6, 1911.

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CHARLES SUMNER.

A PLEA FOR THE

Civil and Political Rights of
Negro-Americans.

CENTENNIAL ORATION OF THE GREATER BOSTON
TWO DAYS OBSERVANCE OF THE BIRTH OF CHARLES
SUMNER BY THE NEW ENGLAND SUFFRAGE LEAGUE
AND THE MASSACHUSETTS BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL
INDEPENDENT POLITICAL LEAGUE, ASSISTED BY
CITIZENS AUXILIARY COMMITTEE.

BY

REV. REVERDY C. RANSOM.

CHARLES SUMNER

A Plea for the Civil and Political Rights of the Negro.

By Reverdy C. Ransom.

Not until the latter half of the 19th century did the American people seriously set their faces toward the realization of the Declaration of Independence. The centenary of the men who had most to do with the new birth of freedom within the nation has fallen upon the opening years of the 20th century. As becomes our best traditions, the citizens of Boston have, on each occasion, gone to Faneuil Hall to extol their deathless deeds and pay reverent tribute to their imperishable names. Our first centenary celebration in recent years was that of William Lloyd Garrison, which, in order, was followed by that of John Greenleaf Whittier and John Brown. Tonight we celebrate Charles Sumner's, within the walls of historic old Park Street church, while before the close of this year the centenary of Wendell Phillips will occur. The patriotic impulse that has prompted us to hold these public assemblages in their honor is strong testimony to the fact that however much obscured for a time, the spirit of Liberty and Justice is not dead. These men were not time-servers, seeking personal or partisan advantage, political preferment, or popular acclaim. In the words of Garrison—they were in earnest—they did not equivocate, they did not excuse—they did not retreat a single inch. In their day as in ours, on the question of the Negro's rights, there was as much stubborn prejudice and frozen apathy in the Northern States as in the South. With a nobler resolve than the Spartan Warrior, who pledged himself to return from battle with his shield or on it, they stood for right against wrong, for liberty against oppression, for justice against tyranny.

The soul of Charles Sumner was cast in a classic mould of Apollo-like perfection. His eloquence was lofty, the form of his periods was chaste and beautiful, but the power of his logic was as terrible as Justice. There are men, black as well as white, who occupy positions of commanding influence and posts of the highest honor, who have so compromised or repudiated the principles for which Sumner gave the best fruits of his life, that any word they might utter in an hour like this would be a profanation of his memory. And unless we, who have assembled here tonight to do honor to his memory, meet the problems of our day in the same resolute spirit he met the problems that confronted him, this meeting will have been held in vain, our applause a hollow mockery, our words a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

Mr. Sumner was elected a United States senator from Massachusetts as a member of the "Free Soil" party. When he entered the senate as an avowed and uncompromising opponent of slavery, he soon took and held a place as the Northern champion of freedom, quite as conspicuous as that which had been previously occupied by Calhoun as the southern advocate of slavery. When Sumner embarked on his career as a commanding figure in national politics, he found the slave-holding oligarchy and its influence arrogant, aggressive, sensitive, brutal, entrenched everywhere. Its baneful influence controlled the press, the pulpit sought to defend it by divine sanction, the Supreme Court upheld it by judicial decisions, it dominated congress, which it aved by threats of nullification and secession if its assumptions were questioned or assailed.

The second great effort of Sumner after he entered upon his senatorial duties was his speech entitled, "The Crime Against Kansas." He based his arguments upon the constitution, upon broken faith in relation to the Missouri Compromise, and pleaded to keep the soil of all the territories of the United States forever free from the invasion of human slavery. While free from bitterness, it was the boldest and most powerful arraignment of the assumptions of the slave power, which, up to that time, had ever been delivered in the senate; its logic was unanswerable. The speech inflamed to madness the advocates of the extension of the domain of slavery. The spirit of slavery was shown in the characteristic reply which it made to his arguments, by the unprovoked assault which was made upon him by Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina, who beat him into insensibility with a bludgeon, while he sat at his desk in the senate occupied with his duties. This speech and the consequences to which it led was more powerful in arousing and influencing public opinion than the heroism of that stern old patriot, John Brown, who at Osawatimie fought for the freedom of the soil of Kansas.

Sumner's speech on "The Barbarism of Slavery," delivered more than four years later, after he had returned from his travels in Europe, whither he had gone to recuperate from the effects of the murderous assault made upon him by Brooks, left slavery completely unmasked. It was shown to be wholly evil in its tendencies and degrading in its influence. All arguments in its defence were answered; its apologists, north and south, were either overwhelmed with confusion, or provoked to that madness which led to treason, while the friends of freedom took heart and within a few months thereafter girded on their armor to fight for liberty and union.

Providence seems to have willed it, that the Negro should be present and participate in the events which have marked every turning point in the history of this nation. Though in chains, he was among the early settlers of this country. While denied the exercise of those rights which the Declaration of Independence pronounced to be "inalienable," he fought with distinction in the armies commanded by Washington; he was with Commodore Perry on Lake Erie, with General Jackson at New Orleans; he was with the armies of General Grant until he received the sword of Lee at Appomattox, and in the ranks of the armies that destroyed the power of Spain in this hemisphere, and for weal or woe, started this republic on the road to empire. When the life of this nation trembled in the balance, it was the valor and patriotism of 180,000 Negro soldiers that caused the scales to turn in favor of the Union and Freedom. The blood of the 30,000 Negroes who gave their lives in defending the flag against secession and slavery has sealed forever the rights of this race to enjoy a white man's chance, wherever floats the flag of the nation they helped to save.

Mr. Sumner lived to see the downfall of the Confederacy and the Union restored on the basis of freedom. With him and the men who stood with him, there was no room for evasion or compromise. They believed that the fruits of freedom should be made secure to the freedmen and their descendants, that it would be worse than criminal to withhold from them the ballot as a weapon of defence against re-enslavement by their former masters.

The ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment was regarded as an act of justice by the President, by congress and by the public opinion of the north. In one of the longest speeches ever delivered by President Grant, he said, in response to a delegation which called upon him—

"I can assure those present that there has been no event since the close of the war in which I have felt so deep an interest as that of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment by three-fourths of the states of the Union. I have felt the greatest anxiety ever since I have been in this house to know that that was to be secured. It looked to me as the realization of the Declaration of Independence."

Mr. Sumner's position on the political rights of the Negro is perhaps better expressed in a letter written by him to a Colored National convention at New Orleans. Among other things, he said:

"In maintaining your rights it will be necessary for you to invoke the Declaration of Independence, so that its principles and promises shall become a living reality, never to be questioned in any way, but recognized always as a guide to conduct, and a governing rule in the interpretation of the National Constitution, being in the nature of a bill of rights, preceding the Constitution."

"There can be but one liberty and one equality, the same in Boston and in New Orleans, the same everywhere throughout the country. The Colored people are not ungenerous, therefore, will incline to any measure of good will and reconciliation; but I trust no excess of benevolence will make them consent to any postponement of those rights which are now denied. The disabilities of the Colored people, loyal and long-suffering, should be removed before the disabilities of the former rebels, or at least, the two removals should go hand-in-hand. It only remains that I should say, Stand firm!"

The Negro should have been unyielding in the past and there should be no compromise today, of that liberty and those rights which a sense of justice caused to spring from the heart of this nation when it was still bleeding from the wounds which had drenched it in blood and scoured it with fire in the awful carnage of civil war. The Garrisons, Philipses and Sumners stood for us when we could not stand for ourselves. Aye, "stand firm," is the

strength of our position now as it was in the past. Since the fetters of our bondage have been broken and our political rights written into the National Constitution, if we do not "stand firm" to preserve inviolate this priceless heritage which has been bequeathed to us, we have small ground for complaint if others are not concerned to stand for us.

All of the rights that we, or other citizens possess, are bound up in our right to vote. Where this is denied or abridged, the bulwark of our protection is destroyed, leaving the way open for the invasion of any or all other rights combined. The enemies of the Fifteenth Amendment well understand this. Any voice which counsels either compromise or surrender is singing to us a siren's song which would lure us and our posterity upon the rocks of political destruction.

We have more to inspire us to stand for our rights today than in the sixties and seventies when Frederick Douglass was the recognized leader of our cause. Then we were illiterate and penniless; our feet were just crossing the threshold of the path that leads to prosperity. Today we own in the southern states not less than 30,000 square miles of land, an area equal in extent to that of Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. We pay taxes on over \$350,000,000 worth of property, we have dotted the landscape with homes, schools and churches engaged in business, have a million children in the public schools and are eager to maintain the best standards of American work, wages and living. Added to all this, after having taken a drink so long and deep at the fountain of political liberty, as to have tasted the sweetness of its life-giving waters, we will not now consent to drink from the bitter pools of the Marah of political serfdom.

The denial of the right to vote, either by intimidation, violence or legal subterfuge, has caused that bastard birth of American political liberty—our nation-wide Jim Crowism—to brazenly usurp the legitimate place of the civil rights of ten millions of Negro citizens. As Preston Brooks, armed with his murderous bludgeon and Charles Sumner armed with right and justice, represented the spirit of slavery and of freedom, so Jim Crowism, armed with a million suppressed ballots, would assail both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, to reduce the Negro to a condition of slavery. It was not only Sumner that Brooks was attempting to strike down, but freedom, truth, justice. Jim Crowism, by insult, degradation, humiliation and dehumanizing assaults, strikes not only the Negro, its intended victim, but human equality, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and our Constitution and Christianity; yea, "it hits the very image of God in the eye." While the act of Brooks was applauded in the south, it found apologists in the north; so today the attempt to proscribe the Negro to a condition of degrading inferiority is justified in the south and accepted, without resistance, in the very birthplace of liberty.

We are well aware of the present attitude of public opinion in regard to the place the Negro should occupy within the nation and the treatment that should be accorded him. Our country is so sensitive to the discussion of the Negro question in the light of equality and justice that more passion and unreason may be aroused over it than upon any single question that touches our religious, social or political life. For this reason, religion keeps it in the background, the press removes it as much as possible, the Supreme Court avoids squarely facing the issue, while our statesmanship, when not wholly silent, deals with it either in platitudes or in the heat of passion. We have actually arrived at the place where it requires courage and may entail sacrifice—political, moral, or financial—for a man, black or white, to plead for justice to the Negro. The white man who does it is regarded as one who neither knows nor understands the Negro, a fanatic who would foist upon the white people social equality with the blacks, while making them in some sections politically dominant. The Negro who stands up for his manhood, as well as his constitutional rights, is regarded as one who alienates his white friends, "a breeder of strife," "dangerous," "bad," "a disturber of harmony between the races," and as "one of the worst enemies of his own race."

To all demagogues, faithless politicians, cowardly moral and social reformers, tyrannical oppressors, and to those Negroes who are either seeking ease and peace at the price of liberty, or who are yet slaves at heart, we have no apology to offer for the position we assume; but all who honestly differ, we meet on the grounds of Christianity, the Declaration of Independence, the Federal Constitution and our common humanity and manhood. There is not an argument advanced today against the agitation for the rights of the Negro, that was not used, in some form, 50 years ago against those who opposed human slavery. As of old, our prophets have no vision, our statesmen no message, and our money changers are busy in the market place, while they cry in unison—"Peace, peace, let us have peace!"

We do not prophesy, but point to the fact that we are storing up materials for the greatest explosion that ever menaced our democracy or Christianity. We are storing them by the prevailing attitude of the south, the courts, the congress, the President, and by the growing self-respect, intelligence and wealth of the Negroes. In some critical situation a very small event may light the fuse which shall precipitate the catastrophe. That the Negro will not be annihilated, our church spires pointing heavenward are the pledge; he will not be deported or colonized, because he will not, neither would our modern Pharaohs let him go; he will not be reduced to a condition of serfdom, because his spirit has been illuminated by the quenchless flame of liberty. We agree with those who counsel patience and moderation, when they include justice also. Those whose repose is disturbed by apprehensions as to the consequences of our insistent demands for our rights, we urge to remonstrate with the aggressors and not with the aggrieved. Let no man chide us for resisting the thief who would despoil us of our goods, but rather let the culprit be apprehended and restore that which he has unlawfully taken away.

While a statue of General Robert E. Lee occupies an honored place in the capitol at Washington, and Justice Edward Douglass White, an ex-rebel, is appointed by a Republican President, chief justice of the highest court of the nation he fought to destroy, may we not boldly demand that the Negro be given every right by the nation whose flag he has always defended, whose honor he has never tarnished, whose loftiest ideals he cherishes, and for the preservation of whose life he willingly yielded up his own upon the field of battle?

Mr. Sumner clearly foresaw the perils that awaited the newly enfranchised citizens; for this reason he labored with all the power at his command to have his Civil Rights Bill enacted into law. His attitude on this question is well set forth in a letter to a Negro convention in Columbia, S. C., in the fall of 1872, in which he says:

"In the first place, you must at all times insist upon your rights, and here I mean not only those already accorded, all of which are contained in equality before the law. It is not enough to provide separate accommodations for Colored citizens, even if in all respects as good as those for other persons. **Equality is not found in an equivalent, but only in equality.** In other words, there must be no discrimination on account of color. The discrimination is an insult and a hindrance, and a bar, which not only destroys comfort and prevents equality, but **weakens all other rights.** The right to vote will have new security when your equal right in public conveyances, hotels and common schools is at last established; but here you must **insist for yourselves, by speech, by petition and by vote.** Help yourselves, and others will help you. Nor has the Republican party done its work until this is established."

If there is anywhere ignorance, confusion, misapprehension or doubt as to what constitutes our American Race Problem, let it now be dispelled. It is the denial to the Negro of those rights for which Sumner worked and pleaded, almost with his dying breath. **Let these be conceded and our race problem will quickly be solved.** It is the denial of these rights that is warping the decisions of the courts, nullifying the Constitution, making Christianity a sham, logic a lie, retarding the development and civilization

of the south and increasing the friction between the races. Until the full and equal enjoyment of the rights common to white men is conceded to Negroes, however much men may legislate, nullify, oppress, compromise or surrender, there will be no peace. We do not contend that, after less than 50 years of freedom, the Negro is able to measure arms with the white man on a footing of equality in every department of endeavor. That would be against the laws of human development and progress. What we ask is a man's chance—that no door be closed against us that we are qualified to enter, that we have freedom of opportunity to rise to the level of our highest and best capacity. No one but a conscienceless hypocrite would contend that discrimination against the Negro, whether under the guise of law or otherwise, is ever carried out in the spirit of justice and fair play. On the question of the Negro's civil rights, the south with the approval of the north, has sought to salve the national conscience, by pretending to provide separate but equal accommodations for the Negro on public conveyances. Be it said to their shame, many Negroes have not only acquiesced, but some have even advocated this arrangement. If the separation of the races were based on the ground of character, conduct, intelligence, or bodily cleanliness, it might find some ground for justification. But to jim crow an entire race on the ground of color alone, is as abhorrent as it is degrading. Again, for the sake of emphasis, we quote Mr. Sumner: "Equality is not found in an equivalent, but in equality. The discrimination is an insult, and a hindrance, and a bar, which not only destroys comforts and prevents equality, but weakens all other rights."

It is not true that the Negro and the white man can be as one in the things that relate to industry and business relations and yet in all other things be as separate as the fingers on the hand. Yet, in the north as well as in the south this sentiment has been applauded to the echo. Yea, it has been capitalized, and is coming to be accepted as the proper solution of our race question. But let us not make up the verdict before we have heard all of the evidence. St. Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, says: "But now are they many members, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; or the head to the feet, I have no need of thee. God tempered the body together, giving more abundant honor to that part which lacked; that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." There can be no harmony or equality between the races, except that of master and servant or of superior and inferior—when they are one only in the things that relate to the purely physical side of life, but separate in all of those broader and more complex relations of intercourse where human life at its best really begins. If in the light of the evidence the decision is against us, we appeal to the Superior Court of justice, on the ground that "there should be no schism in the body," even in the body politic.

With respect to the Negro's political rights, the Fifteenth Amendment is openly set at defiance by the former slave-holding states. No one pretends to believe that the revised constitutions of the southern states were framed with any other end in view than the suppression of the Negro vote, or that their provisions are fairly administered. There is no longer concealment or evasion; the Negro is to be eliminated as a political factor regardless of his wealth or intelligence. But here again, as in the case of the denial of civil rights, it is sought to palliate the injustice. We are told by white men of great influence, and by the only Negroes that the south will tolerate or the north hear with patience, that the Negro should eschew politics and devote himself to agriculture, the trades, business and the saving of money and the acquisition of property, thus gradually, in time, a few will be admitted to the franchise. No clear headed man, white or black, should be deceived by this cunningly devised strategy, by which a whole race is to be delivered into political bondage. Without being able to participate in electing the men by whom he is to be governed, how is the business Negro to protect his business? How is he to secure the same educational advan-

tages for his children? Georgia with her suppressed Negro vote, has not a single school for Negroes. What security has he that he will be permitted to enjoy the blessings of prosperity? What do sheriffs, constables, policemen, mayors, courts, school boards, aldermen, etc., care for the rights of a voteless citizen? Whatever be their care, a public official, or a political party which does not stand in fear of retribution at the polls, and cannot be called upon to give an account of its stewardship, will have small consideration for those who can neither give nor cancel their lease of political power. Once the Irish were ignorant, poor and despised, both in Boston and in New England. But the Irishman had a ballot which he used as a weapon of defence. Who dares despise the Irish now and whisper it above his breath, while Boston has an Irish mayor?

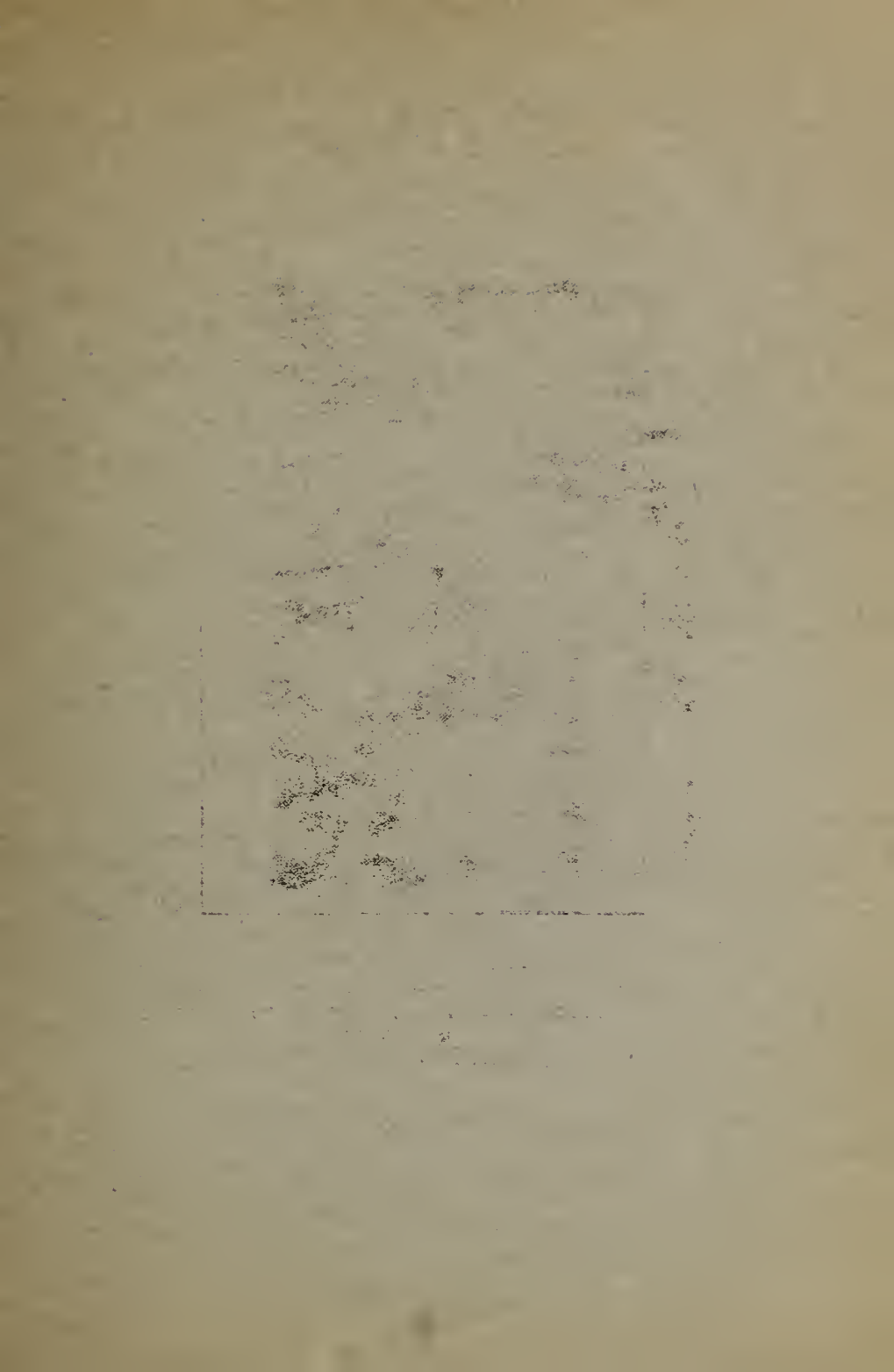
But we are told that such protests as we voice tonight is "whining." If this be whining, we shall not only continue to whine, but to cry aloud against injustice. Again, we are told that we are not constructive. Admittedly, we are working to tear down the last vestige of injustice and tyranny. The men who threw the tea into Boston harbor, the men who fought at Bunker Hill, the men, who like Sumner, assailed the institution of human slavery, were all destructionists.

Under the laws by which the Fifteenth Amendment is nullified and degraded by the humiliating insults of Jim Crowism, the Negro can build nothing but a hideous caricature of American citizenship. So long as it rests upon submission, compromise, suppression, and discrimination, the foundations of our citizenship are built upon the sands. We must destroy before we can build a citizenship that will rest upon every affirmation of the Declaration of Independence and every guarantee of the Constitution. It is said that we are weak and defenceless. But we are no weaker than our courage and determination; neither are we defenceless. We can uphold the flag, support and defend the Constitution, and in all these pivotal states of the north we may divide our vote, or cast it where it will make for our political protection and the restoration of our rights.

This was Mr. Sumner's advice contained in a letter addressed to the Colored people more than 35 years ago, in which he said: "I am sure it cannot be best for the Colored people to band together in a hostile camp, provoking antagonism and keeping alive the separation of the races. Much better will it be when two political parties compete for your vote, each anxious for your support. Only then will that citizenship by which you are entitled to the equal rights of all, have its full fruits. Only then will there be harmony which is essential to true civilization." By his slavish devotion to the Republican party the Negro has rendered himself politically impotent, so that now a Republican President makes the insulting announcement that he will not appoint Negroes to office in any community where the white people object. True, we have been repelled and opposed by the Democratic party. But we are not shut up to a choice between the two dominant parties. If the Republican party holds us while the Democratic party robs us of our rights, we need choose neither. Let us be not for parties, but for men. There are men in both of the old parties willing to concede to us the rights which are now denied. Or better still, we can unite with the Socialist party, as did the Negroes of Oklahoma in the last election, when it stands for equality for all men, regardless of race, class, creed or color.

The Negro has not advanced in character, education or wealth, because he has, perforce or otherwise, let politics alone; he has advanced in spite of it. Is any one so bereft of reason as to believe that the south has driven the Negro from political power, so that he might devote himself to industry and the acquisition of wealth? Yet, this is the argument which the so-called "best friends of the Negro," and those Negroes who are most tol-

erated and subsidized are continually presenting as "a solution." Whatever may be the outward semblance, no question is ever settled until it is settled right. The greatest of all questions among men is the question of government—the condition under which men may live together in society. In the 18th century, beginning in Europe, the great struggle was over the battle for democracy, until it found its noblest birth in our great American democracy. In the 19th century the tide of battle raged between freedom and slavery. With fire and sword and the awful music of the cannon's roar, the victory of freedom was proclaimed. The 20th century opens with the lines forming for the battle for Equality and Brotherhood. This happy consummation is not more impossible or remote than was the realization of democracy or freedom. The present attitude of compromise and submission must be brushed aside, our inequalities must be leveled, race and class hatred must take wings and fly away, every stronghold of tyranny and oppression must be captured and destroyed. The sun of the 20th century is rising to banish the age-long darkness that has so long obscured the recognition of brotherhood between man and his brother man; it will not set until it has gilded with gold the steeples of a new civilization in which Equality and Fraternity have triumphed over Prejudice and Pride.



THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF

CHARLES THE FIRST



BY

J. H. ...